

RBS and RUS, USDA

§4284.910

other legal documents related to the proposed venture;

(3) Hire a Certified Public Accountant or other qualified individual to design an accounting system for the proposed venture; and

(4) Pay salaries, utilities and other operating costs such as inventory financing, the purchase of office equipment, computers and supplies and finance other related activities.

§4284.909 Limitations on use of funds and awards.

(a) In addition to the limitations provided in 7 CFR subpart A, neither grant nor matching funds may be used to fund architectural or engineering design work, or other planning work, for a physical facility;

(b) The total amount provided to any Value-Added project shall not exceed \$500,000;

(c) The aggregate amount of awards to majority controlled producer-based business ventures may not exceed ten percent of the total funds obligated under this subpart during any fiscal year.

§4284.910 Application processing.

(a) *Applications.* USDA will solicit applications on a competitive basis by publication of one or more RFPs. Unless otherwise specified in the applicable RFP, applicants must file an original and one copy of the required forms and a proposal.

(b) *Required forms.* The following forms must be completed, signed and submitted as part of the application package. Other forms may be required. This will be published in the applicable RFP.

(1) "Application for Federal Assistance."

(2) "Budget Information—Non-Construction Programs."

(3) "Assurances—Non-Construction Programs."

(c) *Proposal.* Each proposal must contain the following elements. Additional elements may be published in the applicable RFP.

(1) Title Page.

(2) Table of Contents.

(3) *Executive Summary.* A summary of the proposal should briefly describe the project including goals, tasks to be

completed and other relevant information that provides a general overview of the project. In this section the applicant must clearly state whether the application is for a Planning Grant or a Working Capital Grant and the amount requested.

(4) *Eligibility.* The narrative must include a detailed discussion of how the applicant meets the eligibility requirements.

(5) *Proposal Narrative.* The narrative portion of the proposal must include, but is not limited to, the following:

(i) *Project Title.* The title of the proposed project must be brief, not to exceed 75 characters, yet describe the essentials of the project.

(ii) *Information Sheet.* A separate one page information sheet listing each of the evaluation criteria referenced in the RFP followed by the page numbers of all relevant material and documentation contained in the proposal that address or support the criteria.

(iii) *Goals of the Project.* A clear statement of the ultimate goals of the project. There must be an explanation of how a market will be expanded and the degree to which incremental revenue will accrue to the benefit of the agricultural producer(s).

(iv) *Work Plan.* The narrative must contain a description of the project and set forth the tasks involved in reasonable detail.

(v) *Performance Evaluation Criteria.* Performance criteria suggested by the applicant for incorporation in the grant award in the event the proposal receives grant funding under this subpart. These suggested criteria are not binding on USDA.

(vi) *Proposal Evaluation Criteria.* Each of the proposal evaluation criteria referenced in the RFP must be addressed, specifically and individually, in narrative form.

(6) *Verification of Matching Funds.* Applicants must provide a budget to support the work plan showing all sources and uses of funds during the project period. Applicants will be required to verify matching funds, both cash and in-kind. Sufficient information should be included such that USDA can verify all representations.

(7) *Certification.* Applicants must certify that matching funds will be available at the same time grant funds are anticipated to be spent and that matching funds will be spent in advance of grant funding, such that for every dollar of grant that is advanced, not less than an equal amount of match funds will have been funded prior to submitting the request for reimbursement.

§ 4284.911 Evaluation screening.

The Agency will conduct an initial screening of all proposals to determine whether the applicant is eligible and whether the application is complete and sufficiently responsive to the requirements set forth in the RFP to allow for an informed review. Failure to address any of the required evaluation criteria will disqualify the proposal. Submissions which do not pass the initial screening may be returned to the Applicant. If the submission deadline has not expired and time permits, returned applications may be revised and re-submitted.

§ 4284.912 Evaluation process.

(a) Applications will be evaluated by agricultural economists or other technical experts appointed by the Agency.

(b) After all proposals have been evaluated and scored in accordance with the point allocation specified in the applicable RFP, Agency officials will present to the Administrator of RBS a list of all applications in rank order, together with funding level recommendations.

(c) The Administrator reserves the right to award additional points, as specified in the applicable RFP, to accomplish agency objectives (e.g., to ensure geographic distribution, distribution of a commodity or accomplish presidential initiatives.) The maximum number of points that can be added to an application cannot exceed ten percent of the total points of the original score.

(d) After giving effect to the Administrator's point awards, applications will be funded in rank order until all available funds have been obligated.

(e) In the event an insufficient number of eligible applications are received in response to a given RFP, time per-

mitting, subsequent rounds of competition will be initiated by publishing subsequent RFPs.

(f) Unless a proposal is withdrawn, eligible but unfunded proposals from preceding competitions in a given fiscal year will be considered for funding in subsequent competitions in the same fiscal year.

§ 4284.913 Evaluation criteria and weights.

Unless supplemented in a RFP, the criteria listed in this section will be used to evaluate proposals submitted under this subpart. The distribution of points to be awarded per criterion will be identified in the applicable RFP.

(a) *Planning Grants.* (1) Nature of the proposed venture. Projects will be evaluated for technological feasibility, operational efficiency, profitability, sustainability and the likely improvement to the local rural economy. Points will be awarded based on the greatest expansion of markets and increased returns to producers. Evaluators may rely on their own knowledge and examples of similar ventures described in the proposal to form conclusions regarding this criterion.

(2) *Qualifications of those doing work.* Proposals will be reviewed for whether the personnel who are responsible for doing proposed tasks, including those hired to do studies, have the necessary qualifications. If a consultant or others are to be hired, more points may be awarded if the proposal includes evidence of their availability and commitment as well.

(3) *Project leadership.* The leadership abilities of individuals who are proposing the venture will be evaluated as to whether they are sufficient to support a conclusion of likely project success. Credit may be given for leadership evidenced in community or volunteer efforts.

(4) *Commitments and support.* Producer commitments will be evaluated on the basis of the number of Independent Producers currently involved as well as how many may potentially be involved, and the nature, level and quality of their contributions. End user commitments will be evaluated on the basis of potential markets and the potential